

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793

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Review/Music

Minimalist Diversities From Rhys Chatham

By PETER WATROUS

Rhys Chatham's show on Saturday night at the Kitchen — part of a three-night retrospective — helped place his work historically. And in the way that retrospectives have before, the night also showed Mr. Chatham's limitations as a composer and how quickly time wears away the edges of innovation.

The evening opened with an overweight early piece of Mr. Chatham's from 1971, the year he began to be curator of the Kitchen's music series. Mr. Chatham, joined by Yoshi Wada, banged on two large, heavily amplified Chinese gongs for what seemed like an eternity.

Mr. Chatham then convened four electric guitarists, a bassist and a drummer to begin a series of his rock-influenced Minimalist pieces, pieces that in the late 70's and early 80's seemed radical. Single-minded,

often overwhelming, the best of Mr. Chatham's pieces set up barricades of guitar sound filled with dancing overtones, giving them color and variation. And they have whimsy and humor.

For the most part, though, the compositions worked with different sets of time signatures and rhythms; they shared a leaden rhythmic sensibility that marred much of the work of the early rock-based avant-garde. While Mr. Chatham would call in different guitarists to chime away in different rhythms, in piece after piece, the effect was rhythmically monotonous.

The night ended with "Zephyr Chorus," a piece that for Mr. Chatham was something new. Where his pieces have often seemed rigid and overcontrolled, the work, which was joined by four dancers, was loose and improvisational. Using sampling instruments, Mr. Chatham's music suddenly seemed detailed, connected to other worlds; it bloomed with possibility.